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Understanding the value of art therapy

Melissa Walker, a nationally registered art therapist with experience in the use of the creative arts with military service members and their dependents, writes at ARTSblog:

"A fit, uniformed Marine sat before me, focusing intently on the task at hand. He had been working on creating a mask now for almost two hours. He had never in his life engaged in anything like this before.

"This Marine had recently arrived anxious, confused and angry. After 23 years of service to his country, he felt broken and hopeless. Multiple blast injuries had upset his cognitive abilities and caused daily headaches. Traumatic memories were constantly clouding his thoughts. He worried for the safety of his family. He was overwhelmed.

"Suddenly, the Marine looked up at me. 'I'm finished,' he declared. He stared at the mask, which was covered in symbolism only he could understand. I wouldn't even begin to try and interpret his intentions, but I wouldn't have to. He hesitated, then began pointing out each area of the mask and explaining its significance.

"Afterwards, the Marine stared at me, shocked. 'I've never been able to explain what was bothering me before. And now here it is ... all in one place.'"

— Posted by Melissa Walker, May 13, 2013, at blog.artsusa.org

PERFORMING ARTISTS' TOOLBOX

Four solutions to easing audition nerves

By Craig Wallace
Posted July 22 at www.backstage.com
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As a teacher, the question I am asked most often is: "What can I do about my nerves?" It's a hard question to answer because there can be a number of reasons why your nerves ramp up during the audition process, as well as many things to be nervous about.

So let's examine some of the reasons actors get nervous and see if we can't come up with some solutions by exploring the four "Rs."

1. Relax. If you're a little nervous at your auditions, don't fret; it just means you're human. Our fight, flight, or freeze mechanisms are hardwired into us. It's actually part of our DNA to have feelings of anxiety when we are in new and uncertain situations. Imagine if, instead of running, our ancestors tried to hug every woolly mammoth and saber-tooth tiger they met. We wouldn't be here, end of story. Our flight mechanisms are in us to help ensure our survival, and thank goodness for that.

Auditions engage the flight part of the brain because you are literally exposing the softest part of yourself to a room full of strangers. The increased heart rate and butterflies in the stomach are actually your body trying not to run.

Remember, we come prepackaged with these instincts so relax and accept the fact that if you're a little nervous, it's not your fault. Beating yourself up by thinking that you're doing something wrong by having some nerves only adds another level of anxiety and tension and the nerves become even worse. It's like screaming, "Shut up!" at a crying baby — it doesn't work.

When you accept the nerves and see them as a natural part of being alive, they calm down and you're less likely to be taken over by them.

2. Remove. Carl Jung created a paradigm that deals with anxiety/nerves, and it's one of the simplest paradigms that exist in psychology. It contains the three elements: doubt, fear and anxiety. By definition, the last element of

a paradigm can't exist without the elements that go before. So, if you can remove doubt from the equation, the fear and anxiety won't have a lot of reason to exist.

I've had actors go on and on about how nervous they get in their auditions, and sometimes when I see what they're doing, I understand why. Their work is unspecific, unfocused, and predictable; they are actually right to doubt what they're doing. In these cases, the fear and the nerves are the body's and mind's way of saying, "Get out of there, you're not ready!"



Go ahead and feel the strength, the nerves, the confidence, and the excitement. If you don't block any of it out, you'll feel what it's like to be totally alive and brilliantly human in all of your auditions.

— Craig Wallace

You need to be removing doubt and building strength with every step of your preparation. If your process is shaky and unspecific, you'll have doubts about the effectiveness of the piece and, as noted above, those doubts will lead to fear and anxiety in the audition room.

If, on the other hand, you trust and believe in the technique you use to prepare, your audition will be free from doubt, fear and anxiety, and instead, be rich in power, confidence, and ease.

3. Restore. When nerves are present, it's important not to fight them or push them away. However, you also don't want them to run wild through your mind and body and leave you exhausted.

A simple way to keep nerves from taking over is to breathe — but not just random, heaving gasps for oxygen. Rather, take centered, focused breaths that actually calm you.

A good breath to try if you are feeling a little edgy is a "heart breath." Sitting still, breathe deeply and slowly into your solar plexus or heart center, and then, just as slowly, let it out. Do this a few times, really letting the breath fill the entire area of the heart.

When you surround the heart with your warm, expansive breath, it feels protected, and you begin to feel safer in your body. When it's time for the audition, you'll feel more secure, centered, and strong in your body, mind, and heart.

4. Remember. One way to keep nerves from totally taking you over is to remember your own bravery. Think of all the times in your life you've been in situations that were new and unknown and remember how well you handled them.

You have lived a life and are still on the planet. That is not a small thing, and you have no doubt taken big leaps of faith and shown great courage many times in your life. The fact that you're still here means you're strong — stronger than you might think — and nothing has defeated you, and neither will this audition.

Also, remember that just because you feel a little nervous, it doesn't mean that you can't also feel confident; they are not mutually exclusive.

You are a big container that can hold and handle many different emotions at once. Let them all be present and see them for what they are — just emotions, not instructions of how to behave.

The four "Rs" are a tool to help you stay conscious and manage your audition anxiety so that you'll be able to feel what you're feeling and still remain in control. So, go ahead and feel the strength, the nerves, the confidence, and the excitement. If you don't block any of it out, you'll feel what it's like to be totally alive and brilliantly human in all of your auditions.

About the author

Craig Wallace is the creator and award-winning teacher of *The Wallace Audition Technique*, an audition preparation system that he developed based on his years of experience as a studio executive, talent agent and casting consultant. In his 14 years of teaching, he has seen the careers of hundreds of his students take off. He is also the author of the best-selling book, *The Best of You — Winning Auditions Your Way*.

Wallace is currently teaching his audition technique classes and his *Meditation for Actors* classes in Santa Monica, CA. For details, visit www.wallaceauditiontechnique.com.

New Horizons Bands: Lifelong music learning

New Horizons music programs are designed to provide music-making opportunities for adults ages 50 and above, including those with no prior musical experience. They are based on the idea that many people have never had an opportunity to learn to play an instrument, or have not played in years.

Since the first program began in 1991 at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY, New Horizons has grown to include over 200 bands, orchestras, and music camps, including two bands in Montana.

The first New Horizons band in Montana formed in Kalispell in September 2010. Founded by director Eileen Alexander, the group of nearly 30 seniors rehearses year round, but has three seasons to accommodate snowbirds and other seasonal residents.

Flathead Valley New Horizons Band has performed in the Northwest Montana Fair parade, as well as at veteran's homes, malls, and other venues. This year they performed at the Conrad Mansion on the Fourth of July.



The Flathead Valley New Horizons Band performed at the Conrad Mansion in Kalispell during Fourth of July festivities.

The Kalispell band is seeking new members for their fall session, with music classes beginning Sept. 16. Experienced and intermediate musicians rehearse Monday nights, with beginner classes on Tuesday nights. For more information, call 406-257-1790.

Helena's band began its first rehearsal in February 2011, with 15 people. It has grown to over 50 musicians, with a variety of individuals ranging from those who have never played an instrument before to professional-level musicians. The majority of band members are getting back into playing after many years.

Helena New Horizons Concert Band performs a minimum of four concerts a year from September until May, and many band members play in the Capital City Band during the summer months.

Rehearsals are at 7 p.m. Monday evenings in St. Paul's United Methodist Church, beginning Sept. 9. Visit their website at www.helenanhb.com for more information.

To learn more about New Horizons International Music Association, visit www.newhorizonsmusic.org.